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Assistance to Afghan and Iraqi Women: Issues for Congress

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Summary

This report reviews the U.S.-sponsored funding and programs directed toward women and children in Afghanistan and Iraq. The national and international response to the plight of Afghan and Iraqi women, even to their most recent experience under the Taliban in Afghanistan or Baathist regime in Iraq, will impact their future role and the long-term developments in each country, such as the implementation of a new constitution, the incorporation of women in local and national governance, the role of Islam and the state, the growth of the economy, the curbing of security concerns, and the role of U.S. and international assistance. This report will be updated as events warrant.

Background

The issue of women's rights in Afghanistan and Iraq has taken on new relevance following the U.S.-led military actions in Afghanistan in 2001, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the subsequent reconstruction efforts. One of the major questions facing the United States regarding the reconstruction process is the extent to which the United States can help women reintegrate into the political, educational, and economic spheres after a long period of societal decline, exacerbated by several major wars and, in the case of Iraq, more than a decade of economic sanctions. Advancing the position of women and committing adequate resources to women and girls' education have both been linked, on a global level, to the achievement of efficient and stable development, particularly in post-conflict regions.¹

¹ See CRS Report RL32376, *Women in Iraq: Background and Issues for U.S. Policy*, by Febe Armanios. A longer CRS report on Afghan women is anticipated later in 2004.

Congressional initiatives focused on women have covered a range of political, economic, and social issues. Particular areas of concern include the incorporation of women in local and national governance, the inclusion of women's rights in a new constitution, participation by women in the workforce, access to education, and provision of health care. Basic relief assistance has also been highlighted. This report focuses on foreign aid authorized and appropriated through the Foreign Operations Appropriation or the State Department, which are the primary sources for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan and Iraq. Programs funded through the Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Labor, and Department of Defense are not treated here.²

U.S. Assistance to Afghan and Iraqi Women

Determining precise figures for U.S. Government (USG) assistance provided to women and children is difficult. Many U.S.-funded projects address overall societal issues, such as refugee care and resettlement, health, and job training. These broader humanitarian and reconstruction programs may include women and children, but have other points of focus as well, making it difficult to determine exact amounts spent on women and children. This report emphasizes discrete programs that focus exclusively on women and children.³ The President's FY2005 budget request does not contain specified amounts for aid to women, although the Administration says that a significant amount of the funds for development programs will support activities benefitting women and girls.

Afghanistan: Funding for Women in FY2003 and FY2004. Overall, the situation of women in Afghanistan, has vastly improved since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, particularly in terms of education and job opportunities. A great deal remains undone concerning improvements in the basic standard of living and means of livelihood for the average Afghan woman, including issues related to health care, education, family care, and participation in the political process. In rural areas throughout the country, but particularly in the south and east, attitudes toward women are still conservative and progress toward improved living standards is slow.

Identified below are specific legislative earmarks to support programs for Afghan women and children and general funds that identify women and children among the program beneficiaries. Not included in this discussion are programs that may benefit women, but do not mention them specifically in the legislation, such as general support for schools and education, human rights, health, Afghan communities and families suffering losses due to military operations, etc.

FY2003 Regular and Supplemental Appropriations. In H.J.Res. 2 (P.L. 108-7), the FY2003 Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, \$5 million was earmarked in the Foreign Operations Appropriation from the Economic Support Fund (ESF) to

² The State Department July 2002 and 2003 reports, *U.S. Support for Afghan Women, Children, and Refugees*, provide a good summary of the overall funding from the USG. The 2004 report is expected to be distributed in late June 2004.

³ The Department of State, Office of International Women's Issues provides useful information on assistance to Afghan women including a matrix with specific details on projects and sources of funding. See [<http://www.state.gov/g/wi>].

support activities coordinated by the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs, including support for the establishment of women's centers in Afghanistan. A further \$60 million from International Disaster Assistance specifically for humanitarian assistance also mentions the improvement of the status of women with priority placed on girls' and women's education, health, legal and social rights, economic opportunities, and political participation. Through the FY2003 State Department budget (Commerce, Justice, State appropriations), about \$10.5 million was earmarked for the Asia Foundation and \$2 million for the National Endowment for Democracy for women's rights in Afghanistan. The FY2003 Supplemental (P.L. 108-11) contained no specific earmarks for women's programs in Afghanistan.

FY2004 Regular and Supplemental Appropriations. In the FY2004 Foreign Operations Appropriation (Division D of P.L. 108-199), \$5 million was earmarked from the ESF to support programs to address the needs of Afghan women through training and equipment for women-led Afghan non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The FY2004 Supplemental Appropriations included a \$60 million ESF earmark for women's programs, including technical and vocational education, programs for women and girls against sexual abuse and trafficking, shelters for women and girls, humanitarian assistance for widows, support of women-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and programs for and training on women's rights.

Earlier Congressional Action. *The Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001* (P.L. 107-81) was signed into law on December 12, 2001 to authorize the provision of educational and health care assistance to the women and children of Afghanistan. No specific amount was authorized.⁴ *The Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002* (P.L. 107-327) authorized \$15 million for the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Programs and Projects. In FY2004, Afghanistan was the fourth largest annual recipient of U.S. foreign aid. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supports Afghan women through a number of grants and programs. Specific activities include small grants to establish the Ministry of Women's Affairs, assistance for Afghan NGOs, and opportunities for income generation. Larger aid programs, such as humanitarian assistance and education, have included support for women, and in some cases, have been integrated into other multi-year development programs.

In USAID's current programs, seventeen women's centers are being established in different parts of the country, a range of health and education programs are under way, and programs to support opportunities for women in agriculture and rural environments are being developed. Future activities to support women include additional education initiatives, expansion of rural health programs, development of private sector programs, and a range of projects to encourage political involvement by women, such as registration and participation of women in the national elections and inclusion in community development councils at the local governance level. Thus far, of those registered to vote in the presidential elections now scheduled for September 2004, only 30 percent are women. On June 4, 2004 USAID announced a new \$5 million Women's Private Sector Initiative and plans to initiate a Women's Teacher Training Institute in Kabul.

⁴ The State Department July 2002 and 2003 reports *U.S. Support for Afghan Women, Children, and Refugees* were mandated by this legislation.

The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) provides support to Afghan refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and other vulnerable members of the population. Its primary implementing partners include the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), other U.N. agencies, and NGOs. PRM funds some small programs that target women specifically, such as income generation and literacy training programs for women IDPs and returnees, but most support provided through the implementing partners mentioned above covers assistance and capacity building that includes women, but these programs cannot easily separate out expenditures by gender.

Current Legislative Proposals. Two similar bills, S. 2032 and H.R. 4117, *Afghan Women Security and Freedom Act of 2004*, would authorize assistance and security for women and children in Afghanistan. Each would authorize appropriations of \$300 million in 2005, 2006, and 2007, of which \$20 million is earmarked for the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs and \$10 million is earmarked for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission for each such fiscal year. S. 2032 was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations on January 27, 2004. H.R. 4117 was referred to the House International Relations Committee on April 1, 2004.

Iraq: Funding for Women in FY2003 and FY2004. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the formation of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the Bush Administration has stated its interest in ensuring that Iraqi women are involved in rebuilding and reconstruction efforts in Iraq.⁵ Although figures on total U.S. spending on Iraqi women's programs are not available, the Bush Administration has launched some initiatives in the past year targeting women. In light of increasing violence in Iraq, it is difficult to assess the extent to which these programs have been sustained.⁶

Congressional Action. In conference report language (H.Rept. 108-337), accompanying the FY2004 Emergency Supplemental Appropriation (P.L. 108-106, enacted in November 2003), which provides \$18.4 billion for Iraqi reconstruction, conferees included \$10 million "to support women's programs" in Iraq. In February 2004, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz announced that "the United States is giving special emphasis to helping Iraqi women achieve greater equality and has allocated \$27 million for women's programs." He added that "Education for women is one of the highest priorities, and the United States has committed more than \$86.8 million to

⁵ "U.S. Policy on Iraqi Women's Political, Economic, and Social Participation," August 7, 2003, [<http://www.state.gov/g/wi/rls/22492.htm>]. Also see CRS Report RL32376, *Women in Iraq: Background and Issues for U.S. Policy*, by Febe Armanios.

⁶ Iraqi reconstruction funds, in general, have been managed by USAID, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Treasury. For more information on sector allocations within the FY2004 Emergency Supplemental Appropriation, see [<http://www.congress.gov/brbk/html/apfor38.html>], "Iraq Reconstruction and Supplemental Proposal" (on the CRS Foreign Operations Appropriations page), by (name redacted) and (name redacted).

education projects, with special emphasis on ensuring that girls are registered and attending school.”⁷

Programs and Projects. In March 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced a \$10 million Iraqi Women’s Democracy Initiative, intended to “train Iraqi women in the skills and practices of democratic public life. Programs will include education for democracy, leadership and political advocacy workshops, entrepreneurship projects, media training for women aspiring to careers in journalism, and activities to help non-governmental organizations build capacity.”⁸ The Secretary also announced the formation of a “U.S.-Iraq Women’s Network” (USIWN). Iraqi women’s issues and women’s programs have also received an indeterminable amount of funding through other Iraqi reconstruction funds, targeting women in education, local governance, healthcare, and civil society.

In FY2004, Iraq was the leading annual recipient of U.S. foreign aid. Since April 2003, USAID has implemented a number of programs targeting women, especially in governance. Some of these initiatives have been managed under the auspices of the Iraq Local Governance Program (LGP), an activity intended to provide a foundation for Iraq’s transition to democracy. This program has attempted to deal with the obstacles presented by Iraqi culture to women in governance. The Iraqi Women in Local Governance Group (IWLGG) has also been established in order to “enhance the political participation of women through civic education and training and monitoring the progress of female participation in each local government.”⁹

The LGP also supports and funds initiatives by local women’s groups to develop their own NGOs, civil society organizations, and professional associations. A major component of the project, according to USAID, is to facilitate the participation of women in city councils. Through this program, USAID has held a number of workshops for women throughout Iraq, specifically in cities such as Arbil, Hillah, Karbala, and Baghdad. At these conferences, “international and local participants discuss issues such as Islam, democracy, oppression of women, women’s rights and participation in future elections.”¹⁰

USAID has supported accelerated learning programs that are specifically targeted toward girls’ education. These programs are intended to provide girls with life skills and the academic background necessary to return to formal schooling. A USAID report discussing reconstruction accomplishments in March 2004 indicates that USAID has rehabilitated 2,351 schools and trained over 32,000 teachers and education administrative workers. The report indicates that these efforts “have resulted in children returning to

⁷ “Women in the New Iraq,” February 1, 2004, [<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2004/sp20040201-depsecdef0844.html>].

⁸ “Secretary of State Colin L. Powell To Announce Iraqi Women’s Democracy Initiative and Creation of the U.S.-Iraq Women’s Network,” March 8, 2004, [<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/30223.htm>].

⁹ Information provided to CRS by the Research Triangle Institute, March 2004.

¹⁰ Ibid.

school. Notably, female attendance has surpassed male attendance.”¹¹ It is expected that these programs will continue after the June 30 handover and will be administered through the local U.S. embassy.

Issues for Congress

Challenges for Women Within Afghanistan and Iraq. In the transition to a post-conflict environment, Afghan and Iraqi women face particular challenges, especially in a climate of uncertainty and insecurity. A critical step in the promotion of women’s participation in local and national governance will be their ability to register for and vote freely in elections, campaign for political office, and have full confidence in the design, interpretation, and implementation of their constitution. Congressional funding for democracy building will obviously have an impact on women’s roles in each country, particularly amid the ongoing security challenges. Other key issues include participation in the workforce, educational opportunities, and access to health care.

Designating Funds for Women. One of the key ways Congress has had an impact on the situation for Afghan women has been through a series of legislative earmarks. To date, in Iraq, although some funds have been designated to include women, such as \$10 million for the Iraqi Women’s Democracy Initiative, Congress has not used legislative earmarks extensively for women’s programs.

Oversight and Reporting. Similarly, in terms of oversight and reporting, *The Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001* (P.L. 107-81) mandates that the State Department submit an annual status report to Congress on spending for Afghan women. No such legislation or mandate has yet been developed for Iraqi women, but anticipated supplemental appropriations in early 2005 might provide greater specificity on funding allocations.¹²

Future Developments. In consideration of the funding appropriated in FY2003 and FY2004, there are some similarities in the approach taken by the United States to improve the lives of Afghan and Iraqi women. However, not only do Afghanistan and Iraq have a different starting point in terms of economic development and assistance from the international community, but the timetables for reconstruction are uniquely influenced by ongoing events on the ground. Although it is too soon to draw specific lessons learned from either country, as Congress examines the progress of reconstruction programs for women, it may be important to consider the effect of religious versus secular forces, the variation in local traditions and cultures, and the differences between rural and urban communities to see if the assistance provided to Afghan and Iraqi women is effective and can be used as a model in future post-conflict regions.

¹¹ “USAID accomplishments in Iraq Mar 2003 to Mar 2004,” March 18, 2004, [<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/s/CEC16D9F9A47731085256E5C0056EE14>].

¹² H.Con.Res. 196 (May 2003) and H.Con.Res. 342 (November 2003) each call for an increased role for Iraqi women in governance, civil society, and political-economic life, but do not specify an amount.

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